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NEO-REALISM AND RELIGION

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Neo-Realism, we shall all agree, has come to stay. Though the most recent of philosophical movements, it has already made an abiding impression on contemporary thought. Less noisy than Pragmatism, less fashionable than Bergson's Intuitionism, it has yet quietly won over to its side a far larger number of the younger students of philosophy than one would suspect from the comparatively small amount of Neo-Realistic literature. What is even more striking, its criticisms of Idealism have had at least this effect, that many thinkers who are commonly labelled "Idealists" have hastened to dissociate themselves once more in the most explicit terms from that sort of Idealism of which the watchword is Berkeley's *esse est percipi*. The so-called "Objective Idealists" have become noticeably more objective. To have compelled this re-alignment is in itself no small achievement to the credit of Neo-Realism.

By calling itself "new," contemporary Realism rightly emphasizes its profound difference from the older type of Realism which was synonymous with Materialism. When the tide of reaction against the "speculative philosophy" of Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel was at its height, and the age demanded a philosophy in harmony with the concepts and theories of physical science, then to be a Realist meant to analyze the universe exclusively in terms of "matter" and "force."¹ The world was regarded as a large-scale mechanism, and minds, together

¹ Cf. Büchner's *Kraft und Stoff*.

with all they stand for, as an insignificant and ineffective by-product ("epiphenomenon"), comparable to the noises or sparks of a machine. Philosophy was little more than physics exaggerated to metaphysical dimensions. Whatever facts in the universe cannot be dealt with by the methods and concepts of physics were depreciated, if not ignored. The modern Neo-Realist knows better than that. He is no longer preoccupied with the problem of matter and mind. He is no longer concerned to proclaim matter as the ultimate substance or to treat life and mind as accidental and irrelevant. He knows that "science is not all of truth, nor physical nature all of being."²

There is another important difference between the old Materialism and the new Realism. The former inevitably inclined towards a pessimistic philosophy of life. It depreciated moral effort on behalf of ideals on the ground of its being doomed to ultimate defeat. It depreciated religion as unscientific superstition and make-believe, intellectually false, morally mischievous. Morality was regarded as nothing but man's misguided attempt to stem the tide of nature, to assert his pigmy self against a hostile world, to impose moral ideals on natural forces wholly indifferent to good and ill. Religion could claim scientific warrant neither for the facts on which it pretended to be based, nor for its optimistic estimate of the significance of human values in the scheme of things. From all these prejudices, too, the Neo-Realists have shown themselves to be emancipated, whenever they have dealt with these problems at all. There is nothing in the position of modern Realism which precludes the attempt to provide an adequate "philosophy of life."

In fact, some of the spokesmen of Neo-Realism appear to claim that it is the only type of philosophy which can successfully make this attempt. It is put forward

² R. B. Perry, *Present Philosophical Tendencies*, p. 108.

as the only genuine reconciler of science and religion, the theoretical and the practical interests of men. To achieve such a reconciliation has, not without justice, been regarded as one of the most persistent problems of philosophy. But in all previous solutions, so Professor R. B. Perry declares on behalf of Neo-Realism, philosophy has taken sides. It has either, as "naturalism," capitulated to the aggression of science, or it has, as "romanticism," made itself the champion of religion, even at the price of cherishing illusions. Neo-Realism alone, so we are told, combines disinterested respect for the facts of the world with loyalty to moral ideals. Compared with romantic illusions about the "perfection" of the universe, it is a "philosophy of disillusionment."³ But the disillusionment is wholesome, for the courageous acceptance of a hard truth is a source of power. Neo-Realism "removes illusions only in order to lay bare the confronting occasion and the available resources of action."⁴ The world is not perfect, but perfectible. To perfect it so far as in us lies is morality. To have confidence in its perfectibility and in the efficacy of human endeavour—this "hazard of faith" is religion. Realism is "opposed equally to an idealistic anticipation of the victory of spirit, and to a naturalistic confession of the impotence of spirit. In this sense all bold and forward living is realistic. It involves a sense for things as they are, an ideal of things as they should be, and a determination that, through enlightened action, things shall in time come to be what they should be."⁵ Thus Neo-Realism goes with science in its detached, dispassionate respect for facts, regardless of their present conformity to human wishes and ideals. It goes with morality in encouraging the effort to leave our world better than we found it. It goes with religion, at least if religion is adequately summed

³ R. B. Perry, *Present Philosophical Tendencies*, p. 331.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Loc. cit.*, p. 347.

up in the belief "that what is indifferent will acquire value, and that what is bad will be made good."⁶ On this reconciliation of facts with values and ideals, of nature with spirit, Neo-Realism bases its claim to be the only philosophy which allows us to combine science and religion without sacrificing the one to the other.

In these ways, then, Neo-Realism is genuinely new as compared with the old Materialism. Of course, it has affinities, especially in its treatment of religion, with other modern movements. It shares the belief in the perfectibility of the world ("meliorism") with the Pragmatism of James, and the Instrumentalism of Dewey. In eliminating from religion all supernatural elements and identifying it with the hope of, and endeavour for, a more glorious future for mankind, it presents the same marriage of Naturalism and Philanthropy which was characteristic already of Comte and Mill and the "religion of humanity."

At any rate, it cannot be charged against modern Realism that, like Materialism, it is hostile to the claims of man's spiritual life. A Realist may be zealous for righteousness, for his philosophy may encourage activity on behalf of all good causes. Thus it is because Neo-Realism challenges Idealism, not merely on the technical ground of the *esse est percipi* principle, but on the ground of its philosophy of life and of religion, that it is worth while to examine critically what positive alternative Neo-Realism has to offer. How in detail does Neo-Realism interpret religion? To what facts of experience does it appeal in support of this interpretation? How does it define the relations to each other of knowledge and conduct, of theory and practice, of science, morality, religion and philosophy? It will but add doubly and trebly to the importance of our investigation that we shall ultimately find the whole issue to be turning on the problem of evil.

⁶ Loc. cit., p. 344.

The course of our argument thus demands, first, a brief survey of the main types and varieties of Neo-Realism with special reference to their bearing on religion (Section I). Thence we shall pass to an examination of the only available Neo-Realistic account of the difference between and relation to one another of the theoretical and practical attitudes in life, our main purpose being to determine, in the light of this distinction, how philosophy ought to interpret morality and religion (Section II). Lastly, we shall find ourselves involved in nothing less momentous than a discussion of the problem of evil (Section III). The melioristic thesis that there is no problem of evil except the practical one of how most efficiently to do away with evil, stands confronted by what seems the gratuitous paradox of the thesis that the world is perfect and that the evil in it is a necessary constituent of its perfection. We shall have to ask ourselves whether meliorism is really as plausible and reasonable, and its rival as unreasonable and self-contradictory, as either appears to be on first inspection. It may be we shall be driven to the conclusion that, for a deeper insight, the paradox of perfection disappears, whereas in meliorism contradictions come to light which make it untenable as an ultimate basis for a philosophy of life.

I.

To make a Neo-Realist, very little is needed; least of all any excursions into the realm of religion. Whether a thinker is to be classed as a Realist or not, depends solely on his attitude towards two somewhat technical problems. Has he renounced "epistemological dualism"? Has he, once and for all, forsworn the heresy of *esse est percipi*? If so, he is a Realist. The recipe for making Realists may thus be summed up by saying: Be an "epistemological monist" and affirm the "independ-

ence" of reality and knowledge. Both requirements are combined in Professor R. B. Perry's "cardinal principle of Neo-Realism," namely, "the independence of the immanent."⁷

Let us translate these forbidding technicalities into simpler language. A familiar way of expressing the fact that somebody *knows* something is to say, he has an *idea* of it. Similarly, to be ignorant of a subject is to have no ideas of it. Thus knowledge would seem to consist of "ideas" which are "in" the mind of the knower and "of" the object which is known. But what is an idea? A moment's reflection shows that there is nothing to which we can apply the term unless it be what we have in mind, i.e., what we are conscious of, when we perceive and think. As Locke said, an idea is whatever object is before the mind when it thinks. Thus then of the things which I am now perceiving—pen, paper, table, books, etc., I shall have to say that they are ideas in my mind; so also are Neo-Realism, and the theory of knowledge, and all these topics with which my thoughts are occupied as I write these lines. But if so, what of the real world? What of the things themselves, "of" which I have ideas, that is, to which my ideas refer? These clearly must form a separate order of existences, distinct from the ideas in my, or in anybody else's, mind. Strange as this transformation of everybody's world into ideas in his mind referring to real objects "outside" may seem, are we not committed to it by saying that to know is to have ideas of objects? And where else can ideas exist except in minds? Ideas are mental and to be sharply distinguished from real objects which are non-mental. The familiar distinction of body and mind appears to reinforce this analysis of knowledge. And to clinch the matter, we may remind ourselves how commonly we speak of certain sorts of experiences, for example, dreams, as consisting of

⁷ Present Philosophical Tendencies, p. 313.

“mere” ideas, that is, ideas to which no objects correspond in the outer world. How can we get on without the distinction between ideas which have objects corresponding to them and ideas which have none?

To argue thus is to be an epistemological dualist, that is, to construe knowledge as a relation between two factors, ideas in, and objects outside, the knowing mind. From the difficulties of this theory, which are too obvious and well-known to require recapitulation, our Neo-Realists have happily shaken themselves free. As sound “epistemological monists,” they insist that it is reality itself which we apprehend, not some substitute for, or representative of, it in the shape of an “idea.” The object, as Perry puts it, is “immanent” in knowledge. If we still choose to speak of “idea,” we ought to mean by the term the *status* of the object in its relation to the knowing mind. Thus, for example, my idea of the table is not a mental fact duplicating and referring to an extra-mental fact; it is the table itself considered as an object of apprehension for me, the table so far and so long as it figures in my field of consciousness. On this point all Neo-Realists appear to be agreed, however they may otherwise differ from each other. The English Realists (S. Alexander, B. Russell, and others), for example, have a very different theory of what a mind is from that of the Harvard group of American Realists (R. B. Perry and E. B. Holt). But when Russell declares that “the faculty of being acquainted with things other than itself is the main characteristic of a mind,” and that “acquaintance with objects essentially consists in a relation between the mind and something other than the mind; it is this that constitutes the mind’s power of knowing things”⁸—he eliminates ideas as the *tertium quid* standing between a mind and its objects as decisively as S. Alexander does when he analyzes all knowing into a relation of “together-

⁸ Problems of Philosophy, pp. 66, 7.

ness" or "compresence" between a mental act of apprehension and a non-mental thing.⁹ And in a different way the same "monistic" effect is achieved by Perry and Holt when they treat knowing as a "specific reaction of the central nervous system," and knowledge as the peculiar complex of objects defined by this reaction and by it selected from the objective universe at large.¹⁰ Knowledge, in Holt's striking phrase, is a "cross-section" of the universe. What a given mind knows and what it ignores, what is in that mind and what lies beyond it, depend simply on what the nervous system at a given moment specifically reacts to. Here again there is no room for "ideas."

But this is not all. To eliminate "ideas" from the theory of knowledge is not the same thing as to overthrow the *esse est percipi* principle. For it might still be true that objects cannot exist except in relation to some mind which apprehends them, or some nervous system which reacts to them. Hence it is as essential a part of Neo-Realism to insist upon the "independence" of the object, as it is to insist upon its "immanence." "Things may be, and are, directly experienced without owing either their being or their nature to that circumstance,"¹¹ declares Perry. To be is one thing, to be experienced is another, says Holt; a thing must be before it can be experienced, hence its being cannot depend on its being experienced.¹² In general, things may pass in and out of the relation to a mind or a nervous system, in virtue of which we say that they are known, without being thereby affected in existence or character. As an English Realist puts it: "We can no more think that in apprehending reality we do not apprehend it as it is apart

⁹ The Basis of Realism, Proceedings of the British Academy, Vol. VI, *passim*.

¹⁰ Cf. R. B. Perry, Present Philosophical Tendencies, Chaps. XII, XIII; E. B. Holt, Concept of Consciousness, Chap. IX.

¹¹ Loc. cit., p. 315.

¹² Loc. cit., pp. 20 ff.

from our knowledge of it, than we can think that existence depends upon our knowledge of it.”¹³ In the light of these quotations, we may claim to have made good the point that the minimum which is required to make a Realist is the affirmation of the “independence” of the object of knowledge and the denial of “representative ideas.”

Has all this any specific bearing on religion? Clearly not. So far we have found Neo-Realism to be narrowly preoccupied with a technical problem in the analysis of what it has taught us to call the “cognitive relation,” and the conclusions reached by it carry no obvious consequences for other fields of investigation. Indeed, the Realism of many Realists seems to begin and end here. Where it does so, it is only by guess-work that we can apply the Neo-Realistic conclusions to the problem of religion. Alexander, for example, would probably not object to saying that in religion we are “compresent” with God; and he does speak of the highest stage of knowledge as “seeing all things in God.” Russell’s theory of acquaintance would, if applied to religion, suggest the question whether, as a matter of fact, we are acquainted with God. And if the answer should be in the affirmative, and if we further remember that acquaintance can never be mistaken, the conclusion should satisfy even the most orthodox. But actually Russell’s discussions of religion do not follow this line at all. In fact, they have no point of contact whatever with his Realism in theory of knowledge. Instead, he is concerned with the status of morality and religion in a world of which he conceives the nature and future fate on the lines of scientific materialism. How on this basis he reaches the conclusion that ultimate extinction awaits the human race and the ideals for the realization of which it struggles, has been discussed in a previous article in these pages.¹⁴

¹³ A. H. Prichard, *Kant’s Theory of Knowledge*, p. 119.

¹⁴ Cf. an article by the author on *The Religious Aspect of Bertrand Russell’s Philosophy*, in the *Harvard Theological Review*, Vol. IX, April, 1916.

But there is, of course, no reason why Neo-Realism should remain thus narrowly *epistemological*, why it should not explore the wider vistas which beckon and tempt every philosopher to adventures in speculation. Hence it is not surprising that some of the most powerful thinkers among the Neo-Realists should have responded to the opportunity, and enlarged their vision to the dimensions of a *metaphysical* theory. Nor again is it surprising that through all their differences there should run a common strain, which we can describe only as a naturalistic or, more specifically, *biological* bias. When the history of philosophical thought at the beginning of the twentieth century comes to be written, the adoption of the biological standpoint will, we may safely predict, be recorded as one of the outstanding characteristics of that thought. Having analyzed the nature and function of mind in knowledge, the Realist is naturally ambitious to paint the picture of the universe and assign to mind its place within the cosmic scene. Alexander puts the point prettily. "The temper of realism," he writes, "is to de-anthropomorphize: to order man and mind to their proper place among the world of finite things; on the one hand to divest physical things of the colouring which they have received from the vanity and arrogance of mind; and on the other to assign them along with minds their due measure of self-existence."¹⁵ In a similar spirit, Perry accuses Idealism of being anthropomorphic and "bio-centric," and consequently unable "to survey the totality of things dispassionately," or "to treat them in a spirit of free and critical enquiry."¹⁶ Pronouncements such as these may seem to accord ill with the statement that Neo-Realism exhibits a biological bias. But it is precisely biology, and more generally the theory of evolution, which have led Neo-Realists to look upon life

¹⁵ The Basis of Realism, p. 1.

¹⁶ Loc. cit., p. 107.

and mind as phenomena in a context of varied other phenomena, as late-comers in the order of evolution, and as confronted on arrival by a determinate and pre-existing environment. It was an easy transition from the independent object of knowledge to the pre-existing environment. It was a fascinating task to seek a place for mind and knowledge within the detailed context and structure of this independent universe, once its independence had been established by epistemological analysis. The biological importance of the central nervous system could then be recognized, and it could be fitted into the pattern in its proper place. Mind and knowledge could be brought under the concept of "behaviour," and treated as identical with, or at least as dependent upon, specific responses of the organism to its environment. It was but a step further to ask how far increase of knowledge might extend man's control over his environment for the satisfaction of his needs, how far nature might prove plastic to the realization of his ideals and be made the tool of his progress. Not all Neo-Realists, however, are interested in this latter question. Indeed, we can at this point discern something like a parting of the ways. Our Realist metaphysicians divide themselves into two groups—the *cosmologists* and the *moralists*, as we may conveniently label them. The former are interested mainly in the diversified spectacle of the universe, which they are content to analyze and describe in detail. The latter are interested above all in "moral causality," in "the operation of moral agents on a pre-existing and independent environment." They seek knowledge which shall "illuminate things in order that action may be invented which shall make them good."¹⁷ Cosmological Realism is represented by Alexander and Holt, though in widely different

¹⁷ These phrases and sentences are quoted from R. B. Perry, *Present Philosophical Tendencies*, Chap. XIV, *A Realistic Philosophy of Life*.

ways, Moral Realism by Perry. Alexander, so far, has given us little more than fragments and sketchy outlines of his universe. Roughly we can discern that he arranges its manifold constituents in an ascending order, which appears to be both an order of temporal evolution and an order of perfection. Each fresh step or level in this order is as real and "self-existent" as the rest, but each also introduces some new quality and is thus more perfect than its predecessors. The "secondary qualities" (colour, sound, etc.) are apparently regarded by Alexander as one such level of perfection; life is another, consciousness in animals and men a third. But man is not the apex of this hierarchy. Above man there are higher levels of more perfect beings, for example, angels, and we may fairly conjecture that the hierarchy somehow leads up to and terminates in God. Each level of existence, as Alexander quaintly says, "enjoys itself" and is "contemplated" by the more perfect beings above it. All this, however, is as yet tentative and shadowy, though no doubt it is being more fully developed in the Gifford Lectures which Alexander is now engaged in delivering at one of the Scotch Universities. It is a strange mingling of echoes from early Christian and Talmudic literature with highly modern psychology and biology. But though this Realism is without any explicit philosophy of religion, it is clearly in temper religious. Though its account of the levels of perfection in their relation to each other provides rather for man's contemplation by God, than for God's contemplation by man, yet it is eager to have us realize "both mind and things to be fragments not merely of something larger than their own salient momentary existences but of an infinite whole." In this sense it invites us to "see all things in God."¹⁸

¹⁸ S. Alexander, *The Basis of Realism*, p. 19.

The other of our two cosmological Realists, Holt, is even more silent on religion. His universe is a "neutral mosaic"¹⁹—"neutral" in the sense that the ultimate elements which analysis can distinguish within it, are neither mental nor material but logical. It too has an ascending order, embodying a kind of logical evolution from simple to complex. It is a universe "graded in a strict and inalienable order of complexities." As his clue for a tentative sketch of this order, Holt has apparently used the system of the sciences. His universe begins with the simple entities of logic and mathematics. Soon after come the secondary qualities; then space (geometry); time, motion, mass (mechanics); matter (physics); the chemical elements; the "larger aggregates, such as clouds, rivers, and seas, mountains, plains, continents, and planets." Thence, passing from the inorganic to the organic, we get plants and animals. To this level of complexity too belongs mind or consciousness. Last in the ontological series comes the level of values, to which correspond the normative sciences, for example, æsthetics and "ethics, including perhaps theology."²⁰ Clearly, this is a meagre result for the philosophy of religion, unless we are willing to squeeze what comfort we can out of the assurance that the beautiful, the real, the true, and the good, though the least fundamental in the ontological system, are "the very most important for us as human beings."²¹

The only type of Neo-Realism which is directly interested in religion and which attempts to offer a definite "philosophy of life" is the Moral Realism of R. B. Perry. Negatively this shows itself in its unsparing attacks on Idealism (or "Romanticism") as a philosophy of religion which declares the world to be perfect and

¹⁹ The following account is based on certain passages of Chapter VIII, *The Neutral Mosaic*, in E. B. Holt's *Concept of Consciousness*.

²⁰ *Loc. cit.*, p. 160.

²¹ *Ibid.*

the good to be fully realized here and now. Positively it shows itself in its plea for the cosmic efficacy of moral efforts, and in its demand for a religion, not of resignation and endurance, but of vigorous aggression upon evil and devoted labour in the cause of human progress. To the examination of this theory of religion we must now turn, considering first its general account of the relation of theory to practice (or "belief"), and secondly its plea for the perfectibility of the universe.

II.

Belief and theory, so we may summarize Perry's argument,²² are both forms of knowledge, and "knowledge furnishes the illumination and guidance of all conscious action." In order to do so, knowledge must of course be true. But merely to assert a theory, however true, is not enough. We must also adopt it as a matter of belief. Only then does it become a plan of life. Until theory takes on the form of belief, it "lacks that confidence and steadiness without which no consecutive endeavour is possible." Indeed, the difference between theory and belief cuts much deeper still. It is a moral difference. A different motive is involved, a different human good. In the attitude of theory, we care only about the attainment of truth. In the attitude of belief, we assume truth and look to efficiency of action. So again these attitudes differ in their social effects. "To belief, society owes its cohesiveness and stability; to theory, it owes its chance of betterment." But even this is not the last word. Theory, just because its end is truth, is in principle divorced from action. "The theoretical mood, even when a conclusion is reached, is a state of practical doubt." The conclusion need

²² All quotations in this section, unless otherwise stated, are taken from R. B. Perry's *Present Philosophical Tendencies*, Chaps. I and II. A first draft of Chapter I appeared in the *Harvard Theological Review*, Vol. III (1910).

not be, like a belief, assimilated into the agent's life as, so to speak, its inspiration. Indeed, so Perry seems to hold, this divorce from action is a positive advantage for theory, because it secures "that immunity from direct social responsibility which is most conducive to clear seeing and straight thinking." Ultimately this estimate of the place and function of theory in life rests on the view that essentially "to theorize is to doubt." And even though doubting here seems to mean inquiring, investigating, researching as much as disbelieving, still it means playing among hypothetical alternatives, weighing inconclusive evidences, and therefore refusing to commit oneself. And, again, in the pursuit of truth, the theorist is entitled to concern himself with matters minute and remote from all practical interests. "The theoretical mind is not held to those standards of proportionateness which obtain in life."

Even if we have followed Perry's previous argument without a murmur of dissent, this last statement must surely give us pause. True, Perry speaks of this neglect of proportions as an "incident of theoretical analysis," and mentions scientists, not philosophers, as practising it. Still, he fails to make clear that the one kind of theorist who, whatever details he may study incidentally, cannot afford to ignore the standards of proportionateness is the philosopher, especially when his aim is to formulate an adequate "philosophy of life." In fact, the trouble is not that the philosopher is held to these standards, but that they are so hard to discover. Actual life so perplexingly and even cruelly confuses the standards, that it requires trained insight to discern them in the welter of first appearances. Again, though doubting, investigating, and the trying-out of hypotheses are instrumental to theorizing, yet essentially it consists, not in doubting but in contemplating. This is true not only because, after all, we do reach conclusions. It

is true chiefly because in philosophy, as we may say in direct challenge to Perry's dictum, to theorize is to apply to the interpretation of life the insight gained from one's best, if rarest, experiences. In the dust of the daily road we need the hill-top views. The philosopher, above every other kind of theorist, requires the eye for the fundamental realities which only his deeper experiences adequately reveal. This is, after all, the spirit in which Perry himself philosophizes when he urges upon our acceptance his view of man as striving to transform the world by the realization of his ethical ideals. There he does not "doubt." He communicates his insight into life—or, to use William James's terms, his "vision," his "mode of feeling the whole push of life."²³ This is, so we suggest, an example of the kind of thinking on which we ought to model our theory of what "theory" is and does. A philosopher owes it to his own enterprise to describe theory where he finds it at its best. And that is not where it operates amidst the necessary abstractions of science, but where, as in philosophy, it seeks "to see life steadily and see it whole."

It is but another way of putting this same point to say that such a thing as Perry's "philosophy of life" carries us at once beyond his own antithesis of "belief" and "theory." That it does so, is all to the good. For, if we may judge from the great thinkers, a Plato, a Spinoza, a Kant, or a Hegel, the divorce of theory and belief is not characteristic of philosophy at its best. Such philosophy is too deeply rooted in the realities of experience to cease "believing" (in Perry's sense) merely because it reflects and investigates. The experiences which illuminate life and teach one to read its values aright carry, so to speak, their own guarantee. There is nothing hypothetical about them. Whatever stability and

²³ A Pluralistic Universe, pp. 20, 1.

steadfastness we need in life we must draw from them. It is precisely the function of the kind of theory which we call philosophical, to seize upon these insights and make them available for the interpretation of our world. But thus understood, philosophy takes us once for all beyond the stage where man needs to "convert theoretical probabilities into subjective certainties and to believe more than he knows."

Our concept of philosophy supplies us with a point of view from which to weigh what Perry has to say about the difference between religion and science, and the relation of philosophy to both. "Religion," we read, "has to do with the general character of nature as a whole, or with whatever may lie beyond nature and still belong to the environment of life." It is essentially "a plan of action," "man's hope or despair of salvation." It springs from the need for "a final adaptation," for coming to terms, as it were, once and for all with God, this being "the name for the over-ruling powers as sources of fortune." Whether this description of religion in biological terms of environment and adaptation is adequate, we need not now stop to consider. For the moment we are interested only in its relation to science and philosophy. Science, we are told, is the pure embodiment of the theoretical motive, that is, of disinterested curiosity. Religion similarly is the pure embodiment of the practical motive, that is, the highly interested desire for a plan of action which shall secure the maximum of good fortune from the environment as a whole. But obviously "an enlightened and therefore effective religion" requires itself to be based on a thorough theoretical understanding of this environment, not in its proximate details but in its general and ultimate features. Not science but only philosophy can meet this requirement, for only philosophy deals theoretically with ultimates. Whence it follows that "as popular or applied science is related to

pure science, so religion is related to pure philosophy." And again, "it is as important for religion to promote the development of a rigorously theoretical philosophy, as it is for engineering to promote the development of theoretical physics." The qualification "rigorously theoretical" covers the demand that during the course of the inquiry the passions be repressed and the application of results to life ignored, lest hopes and fears beget illusions and dreams. "Religion is no exception to the rule that man conquers his environment and moulds it into good through forgetting his fears and renouncing his hopes, until he shall have disciplined himself to see coolly and steadily." Now religion, as Perry says elsewhere, is the embodiment of man's "optimistic bias."²⁴ Being "belief," it is the spirit of hope and confidence which sustains him in energetic living, that hope of "salvation" which, for Perry, seems to coincide with "moulding the environment into good." From all this we may conjecture for philosophy, as the theoretical basis of religion, a threefold task. On the one hand it must, in the critical and unprejudiced manner of science, examine the ultimate nature of the environment of human life as a mere matter of fact. On the other it must, with like disinterestedness, study what things are good or have value in virtue of the fact that human beings desire them. Presumably it must also rationalize these desires and their goods, i.e., organize them into a harmonious system, securing the maximum fulfilment of desire and the maximum realization of what is good. Lastly, philosophy will have to decide whether, the facts being what they are, the maximum fulfilment of interests, or at least a progress towards increasingly complete fulfilment, is possible. If so, we shall be justified in "believing," that is, in labouring with zest and confidence for making the world an ever better and more satisfactory place for hu-

²⁴ *The Moral Economy*, Chap. VI, p. 231.

man beings to live in. This is what Perry calls "the Baconian idea," the "axiom of modern civilization." "The good is to be won by the race and for the race; it lies in the future, and can result only from prolonged and collective endeavor; and the power to achieve it lies in the progressive knowledge and control of nature."²⁵ Science, so we may sum up his view in our own words, supplies the detailed knowledge of causes and effects, without which action would be impossible for lack of means. Philosophy investigates whether as a whole nature is favourable to the realization of human desires, that is, plastic to human action. Religion turns philosophy's verdict into belief and thus supplies the dynamic element. Its watchword, one feels, ought to be, Full steam ahead for efficiency and reform. Such is, as a matter of fact, the account of the theoretical content of religion, or "religious truth," which Perry offers in his *Moral Economy*.²⁶ Religious truth consists of ethical judgements concerning human interests ("what the believer has at stake"), and cosmological judgements concerning the environment at large, which in its bearing on the worshipper's interests is called "God."

On the whole theory a single comment will suffice at this stage of our argument. Perry's account of religion entirely ignores the *mystical* element in it. The biological language in which he has cast his description, only serves to throw this neglect into bolder relief. Hence his treatment cannot but strike as inadequate all who regard mystical experience as the intensest and purest form of religion. For such an utterance of religious experience as St. Paul's "Not I, but God that worketh in me," there is no room within Perry's formula. In discussing religion, it is inevitable that every

²⁵ Present Philosophical Tendencies, pp. 4, 5.

²⁶ Chap. VI, on "The Moral Justification of Religion," originally printed in the Harvard Theological Review, Vol. II, April, 1909.

thinker should reveal himself, that he should lay bare, as the basis of his argument, the type of experience through which he "feels his continuity with reality." For Perry this is clearly moral enthusiasm, the reformer's zeal for the bettering of his world through the realization of his ideals. This he offers as the essence of religion—what religion ought to be, what at its best it is. Though one feels tempted to say that he sacrifices religion to morality, yet such a zeal for progress in human welfare, for rendering service to the cause of reform, for fighting against evil in all its guises, is clearly something without which religion would be poor and ineffective. The question is whether, as it stands, this is equivalent to religion. The answer, it is hardly possible to doubt, must be No. Religion after all is an historical fact in the lives of men and, dogma apart, has found expression in utterance and conduct in so many forms that a comparative study not only reveals the main "varieties of religious experience," but enables us also to discriminate higher and lower forms—experiences, or lives, in which the distinctive and unique character of religion is more completely and adequately exhibited than in others. One might instance Christ or St. Paul or St. Francis. No combination of cosmology and ethics, welded together from a biological point of view, such as Perry offers, seizes the distinctive quality of religion as these "men of God" exhibit it. A philosophical theory of religion which fails to include, not merely one variety of religious experience among others but the most characteristic and revealing variety of all, namely, mysticism, offends against the canon of philosophical interpretation of experience which we laid down above.

III.

But the real trial of strength between these two ways of using experiences as material for philosophical theory, and thus extracting from them that wisdom which both is true as insight and imparts the right temper to conduct, is still to come. The issue so far has been whether religion, as a matter of experience, is identical with "moral enthusiasm," especially when this enthusiasm wears the biological air of an effort so to control and modify the environment that it becomes a better place for men to live in. As the alternative to this we have taken the view that religion, while involving morality as an element within itself, yet is as a whole a distinctive type of experience, of which the keynote is mysticism. The real touchstone of the adequacy of these two views, as we are now about to see, is the problem presented by the fact of evil.

To clear the ground for fruitful debate, let us put aside irrelevant topics and set down explicitly what is common ground for both sides. As irrelevant we shall regard the familiar dialectical puzzle how a perfect whole can consist of imperfect parts, or, to put the puzzle in theological language, how the existence of sin, error, and evil is consistent with the creation of the universe by God defined as all-wise, all-good, all-powerful. Let it be agreed that evil is neither an illusion nor yet something willed and planned as adding zest and spice to the perfection of the cosmic spectacle for a divine spectator. We will have no God enjoying from the stalls the tragedy of human sin and suffering enacted on the stage. Nor does experience support the suggestion that evil is as unsubstantial as a dream. Such interpretations pervert the judgement of perfection, the roots of which in our experience it will be our task to search out.

Again, let it be agreed that our world and our lives show a pattern of mingled good and ill, and that under these conditions there is as much need for the steadfastness of mind which endures suffering patiently and is not debauched by good fortune, as there is for the moral struggle to defeat evil and realize good. Doing one's best, the "full deliverance of one's self to the cause of goodness," as Perry finely puts it,²⁷ is essential to happiness, by which we mean the sense that life is worth while. We shall make no attempt to call the universe "perfect" in any sense which makes morality meaningless.

Yet again, let it be agreed that we are not to make out a case for or against a surplus of pleasure over pain, nor to show every item of pain and wrong to be overbalanced or cancelled by some compensating joy or good. Least of all shall we pretend that evil is somehow good in disguise, or borrow the convenient philosophy of Pangloss in Voltaire's *Candide*: "Les malheurs particuliers font le bien général, de sort que plus il y a de malheurs particuliers, plus tout est bien."

All these issues being set aside, what issue remains? Where do we differ? The point of deep difference may be put in a nut-shell by placing side by side two sentences from Perry's *Moral Economy*: "If life is a real tragedy, it can be endured, and to enter into it will bring the deep satisfaction which every form of heroism affords."²⁸ And, "The moment evil is conceived as the necessary but diminishing complement to partial success, the sting of it is gone. Evil as a temporary and accidental necessity is tolerable; but not so an evil which is absolutely necessary, and which must be construed with some hypothetical divine satisfaction."²⁹ We have agreed above to put aside as irrelevant the appeal to a hypothetical divine satisfaction. We are to argue on the

²⁷ The Moral Economy, p. 254.

²⁸ Loc. cit., p. 251.

²⁹ Loc. cit., p. 249.

basis of human experience, taking it where it is at its best. Thus approached the question is whether the arduous and heroic life with the conditions, that is, the pain and the evil which evoke heroism, is worth while, enduringly and for its own sake, or whether morality is worth while only on the prospect of the final eradication of evil and therefore the abolition of morality itself. The issue is put misleadingly as a choice between "the practical optimism or meliorism which stakes its hope on the chance that the world *may be made* better," and "the contemplative or quietistic optimism, which consists in the faith that the world *is* best."³⁰ The alternatives are not moral endeavour *versus* moral holiday, doing one's best *versus* doing nothing, fighting evil *versus* resignedly acquiescing in it. The only question worth asking and answering in this matter is, What kind of life, and under what conditions, is fundamentally most worth while as enabling us to make the most of ourselves—life in this actual world of ours with its suffering and evil, or life, as the meliorist's fancy paints it, in a world without either? If the decision is, as we hold it must be, in favour of the former alternative, then the meliorist is deluding us with his promise of a world which, in James's phrase, has been made to "forget the very place and name of evil."³¹ He is falsifying the very spirit of morality by his suggestion that only as a means to the realization of such a world is morality really worth while.

More abstractly the problem might be put in the form of the question, Is the value of evil purely negative, as of something to be once and for all eliminated, or is it so closely interwoven with the whole tissue of this double-edged life of ours that it is not only ineradicable as a matter of fact but positively valuable as the condition

³⁰ Present Philosophical Tendencies, p. 248.

³¹ Pragmatism, p. 297.

without which other values cannot be had? It should be clearly noted that in asking this question, we have left behind the level where desire and aversion, the things towards which and the things against which we are moved, are polar opposites. We are asked to survey life *as a whole*, with its values and their conditions. And "as a whole" means that we are not now to pick and choose, saying we would like to retain this and rather do without that. It means that once we understand the sources of all that is valuable, we shall find evil among these; and we shall find further that if evil were to be eliminated, utterly and in principle, the things which are good would not survive it. It is this reflection which underlies the "judgement of perfection" and leads in a sense to an acceptance of evil, and to a preference for the actual world with evil over an imaginary world without evil. Only let it be noted that this acceptance is not resignation nor a betrayal of morality. It rather begets loyalty to morality by dispelling the illusion that an evil-less, painless world is both possible and, from the profoundest point of view, desirable. Thus the "judgement of perfection" does not contradict or cancel morality, for it is made from a point of view which may be described in all seriousness as "beyond good and evil."

It is not merely as an *argumentum ad hominem*, but as an illustration of the way in which the logic of experience will over-ride the prejudices of inadequate theory, that we shall quote a professed and eager meliorist in support of our contention. The meliorism of William James is part of the friendly philosophical polemic which he carried on against Royce's defence of the perfection of the universe. That defence James labelled "tender-minded," apparently under the impression that somehow a denial of the reality of evil was involved. But it would appear to require a "tougher"

courage to accept both evil and the fight against it as among the *permanent* "hazards and hardships" of finite life than to console oneself with the hope of a world in which there shall be neither. At any rate, James himself, on occasions, when he happily forgot his meliorism, showed himself possessed of this very courage, and made his choice of lives accordingly. There is the famous and oft-quoted passage describing his visit to the Assembly Grounds on Chautauqua Lake.³² He sets out eloquently the absence of disease, poverty, drunkenness, crime, and the realization of the meliorist's dream. "You have culture, you have kindness, you have cheapness, you have equality, you have the best of what mankind has fought and bled and striven for under the name of civilization for centuries. You have, in short, a foretaste of what society might be, were it all in the light, with no suffering and no dark corners." Yet after seven days of this "middle-class paradise, without a sin, without a victim, without a blot, without a tear," he bursts out, on emerging again into the dark and wicked world with "Ouf! what a relief! Now for something primordial and savage, even though it were as bad as an Armenian massacre, to set the balance straight again. . . . Let me take my chances again in the big outside worldly wilderness with all its sins and sufferings . . . all its moral style, expressiveness and picturesqueness—the element of precipitousness, of strength and strenuousness, intensity and danger."

In this utterance and in the experience which it records we have the very logic of the "judgement of perfection," the acknowledgment that this actual world of ours *is the best* world, in the sense that it is the kind of world in which it is most worth while to live. Beside it melioristic dreams fade into nothingness.

³² Talks to Teachers on Psychology and Life's Ideals, pp. 268 ff.—quoted and discussed by B. Bosanquet, *The Value and Destiny of the Individual*, pp. 332 ff.

Those for whom the "judgement of perfection" expresses the deepest insight into these matters, accept evil and the struggle against evil as permanent features of the universe, and they accept life in this universe on these terms as supremely worth while. They accept it, not with a gesture of despair or condemnation but, like James, confidently and even joyously, content to play a man's part and fulfil a man's destiny under the conditions of finite existence. They accept life, as the marriage-service has it, "for better, for worse." Is this optimism? Is this pessimism? Our classificatory pigeon-holes will not contain such an attitude. It is a recognition of value which carries us, as we said, "beyond good and evil." As the spirit of daily living it is religion. As reflective theory it is philosophy, and, paradoxically enough, though usually called "idealism," it is really the only philosophy which is realistic to the bitter end.